

# Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire  
**John H. Lynch**  
*Governor*

Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food  
**Stephen H. Taylor**  
*Commissioner*

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## **From Your Commissioner...**

### **State's Farmers' Markets Seek Best Vendor Mix**

Lorraine Clark of Lempster presides over the Newport Farmers' Market, one of the three or four largest such enterprises in the state, and she deals every week with the challenges managers of farmers' markets all over the state must face.

These issues include assuring good quality, orderly presentation, traffic control and the right mix of vendors. And, of course, there's always something she has no control over: the weather.

Newport Farmers' Market got rolling two weeks ago with about 40 vendors, a number that fluctuates over the season but usually swells as the fruit and vegetable harvest picks up. The market draws heavily from the wealthy summer population around nearby Lake Sunapee.

"We try to maintain a good variety of vendors, with about 60 percent being farmers offering produce, 30 percent people with baked goods and prepared foods and then 10 percent crafts," Clark says.

"You have to be very particular about crafts, and often a crafts vendor will sign up for space and then quit after a one or two weeks. But there's always a waiting list of crafts people ready to jump in."

Littleton Farmers' Market allows up to 50 percent of its 40-odd vendors to sell craft items, and co-manager Ray Garcia says it could easily have dozens more hawking art, leather goods, pottery, carvings and other similar stuff if it wanted.

"A 50-50 split is about right for us," Garcia says, "and we make sure all our food vendors are selling only locally grown or locally made products."

New Hampshire will have 60 farmers' operating this year, a 500 percent increase in number from the total back in 1992. The tremendous growth has been spurred by the rising consumer interest in buying local foods, a new generation of small producers who like once- or twice-a-week merchandising and the federally funded market coupon programs for senior citizens and mothers with young children.

For most of the state's farmers' markets it's relatively easy dealing with local officials and bureaucracy, but in Nashua, the state's second-largest city, it's been an uphill struggle with permitting and inspection. Drema Cady, coordinator of the city's two farmers' markets, says health officers are rough on vendors, even prohibiting the sale of fresh eggs for some inexplicable reason.

While produce, prepared foods and craft items are the primary draws for farmers' markets several around the state are luring customers in with entertainment.

Lebanon Farmers' Market is held in the city's leafy downtown park, and it features music every week, with a

schedule that includes traditional, Celtic, Appalachian, calypso, progressive and retro folk, Nova Scotia fiddling, steel band and hammered dulcimer performers.

And while you're listening to the tunes at Lebanon you can shop for hard cider, Pakistani dishes, African samosas and Mexican empanadas along with fresh locally grown veggies and fruits.

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Our locally owned horticultural operations and garden centers face brutal competition from the big-box retailers that have blanketed the state over the past couple of decades. But from observation at various mega-store locations this spring it's clearer than ever that our hometown operations have the clear edge on quality.

Much of the plant material offered for sale by the chains is essentially there on consignment—the store only pays for the product when it goes over the scanner at the register. The supplier is responsible for the care of the plants until they're purchased by the consumer, so it can be dicey whether they get adequate water and care while they're sitting out on the pavement waiting to be sold.

**Steve Taylor, Commissioner**